

The WITCH'S GUIDE

to COOKING with CHILDREN



KEITH MCGOWAN

with illustrations by YOKO TANAKA

TEACHER'S GUIDE

Discussion Questions and Activities

PRE READING ACTIVITY

Ask students to use the Internet to **investigate the traditional elements of a fairy tale**. Then have them prepare a three-column chart with the headings Traditional Fairy Tales, “Hansel and Gretel,” and *The Witch’s Guide*. In the first column, brainstorm as a class and have students list the facts from their research.

For students who might not be familiar with the Grimm Brother’s fairy tale “Hansel and Gretel,” and to review for all students, read the story to the class. It can be found at <http://www.fln.vcu.edu/grimm/haenseleng.html>. Then have them identify and list in column two the story components from “Hansel and Gretel” that correspond to the traditional elements of a fairy tale that are listed in the first column. After reading *The Witch’s Guide*, have students complete the third column with corresponding traditional elements from McGowan’s retelling.

CURRICULUM CONNECTION ACTIVITIES

ENGLISH, LANGUAGE ARTS, AND WRITING

Have students locate the following words in *The Witch’s Guide* and determine their meaning from the context clues. Then have them use a dictionary or thesaurus to solidify meanings and to identify antonyms for the words. Ask students to **write a diamante poem** using a word and its antonym as the first and last line of the poem.

gullible, page 5

clinchier, page 46

grimace, page 10

extraordinary, page 42

mope, page 14

expansive, page 73

absorbed, page 37

dense, page 76

The reader knows what happens to Fay Holaderry but has no idea about Mr. and Mrs. Blink. Where do they go? And who receives the inheritance from the wealthy uncle—the Blinks or Sol and Connie? Does the special cane break the curse of the woman from All Creatures Great and Small? What happens to her? Ask students to **write an epilogue** explaining what happens to each of these characters and share these epilogues with the class.

When Sol finds out what really happened to his long-distance heat-detection device on the Terrible Day, he is horrified at what Connie has done. Ask students to **write a letter** from either Sol or Connie to Mrs. Alma or Principal Warrick explaining the events leading up to that day and what Connie did to sabotage Sol’s project. Also include in the letter how Sol reworked his device to save their lives from the evil Fay Holaderry. Make sure each letter includes all the right elements of letter writing. Ask students to read their letters to the class and then post them in the classroom.

Sol, always trying to teach Connie science, poses a simple question about ice melting in a glass of water (*see page 16*). He asks her if the water will be higher or lower than the original when the ice has melted. Ask students to **perform this simple science experiment** with a partner and to determine the outcome. Then ask them to research the reason for the results and to report to the class what they discover.

Fay Holaderry possesses an abundance of poisonous plants in her home—some put children to sleep, some make them sick, and others cause them to laugh uncontrollably. Ask students to work in small groups and research poisonous plants and flowers. Have each group **identify the poisonous plants** in the following manner:

Common and Scientific Names

Habitat

Physical Description of the Plant

Negative Effect, if Any, on Humans

Antidote for Poisonous Effects

An Illustration

Then **make a classroom booklet** of the variety of poisonous plants, asking one student to design a cover and another to type the index and table of contents. Display the book in the school library.



When Mr. Blink leaves Sol and Connie in town, they have no trouble finding their way home because Sol has maps and bus schedules to guide them. Ask students to **plan a trip** to the downtown area of their hometown or other nearby urban city using public transportation (if your city or town has no public transportation system, ask students to plan a car trip). As students plan their adventure, they should select a location to visit, print maps of the area, locate transportation schedules and routes, and calculate the cost of the trip. They should also make a list of important phone numbers that might be useful. Have students **develop an itinerary** of their day's adventure and include a map of the route they will be taking to arrive at their destination.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

- 1 Like most brothers and sisters, Sol and Connie differ in personality and interests. How do their differences lead them to the discovery of who Fay Holaderry is? How do their differences ultimately save their lives? Why are they so close and dependent on each other?
- 2 Mrs. Alma, Sol's science teacher, believes in Sol, and she encourages him to pursue his talent and interest. How does her support help Sol? Why does he feel like he lets her down on the Terrible Day?
- 3 In what ways does Connie feel inferior to Sol? How do her feelings negatively affect Sol on the Terrible Day? How does that day affect Sol's opinion of himself?
- 4 Sol's suspicions of Fay Holaderry increase when he discovers that Swift is chewing on a human femur. What other conversations and events cause him to be concerned about her motivation to be nice to Connie and him?
- 5 How does Mrs. Blink use Mr. Blink's family lineage and hers as justification for turning Sol and Connie over to the witch? What finally clinches the deal for Mr. Blink? Why is he easily manipulated?
- 6 It is no mistake that the good woman from All Creatures Great and Small has survived the centuries just as the evil Fay Holaderry has survived. How do the two women counteract each other in the story? Does the woman from the shop have any helpers that the readers know about?
- 7 The librarian is just one of the helpers Fay Holaderry has employed in the town. How does the witch find her helpers? What do they receive for helping the old witch? Why would they help her?
- 8 Does the reader know how old the various helpers are? Does the author introduce any young characters in his story? What could this mean about the town of Grand Creek?
- 9 What do Sol and Connie think happened to their father and his wife? Do they ever discover the truth about their father? How does the reader know?
- 10 Why is Sol unwilling to forgive Connie for sabotaging his science fair project? How will this affect their relationship? Does Connie intentionally sabotage Sol's invention? Why is the witch willing to forgive Swift for helping Sol and Connie escape? How do the two incidents relate?



POST-READING ACTIVITY

Ask students to create a “My Life with the Witch” journal centering on *The Witch’s Guide to Cooking with Children*. Have them select one of the following characters: Sol, Connie, Mr. Blink, Mrs. Blink, the woman from All Creatures Great and Small, Swift, the librarian, other helpers, or another character of their choosing. Each student should assume the voice of the character and write a series of journal entries based on his or her experiences, relationship, and involvement with Fay Holaderry, and how the character feels about her. Then have students prepare and practice their journal entries for presentation to the class. Each student should attempt to capture the voice, attitude, mannerisms, and pacing of the character. If desired, they may add costumes and special effects such as lighting and music to enhance the journal readings.



ABOUT THE BOOK

In this retelling of the Grimm Brother's fairy tale "Hansel and Gretel," science whiz Sol and his sister, Connie, rely on modern technology and scientific information to solve a mystery and keep them safe. When Sol and Connie move to Schoeberg with their stepmother and the man they believe to be their father, they meet their neighbor, the witch Fay Holaderry and her dog, Swift, who chews on a human leg bone. Together Sol and Connie set out to discover the truth about Fay Holaderry and their new town. Their parents have secrets, too—about their true identity and the reason they moved to this particular town. After several attempts by their parents to leave them in harm's way, Connie is finally kidnapped by the strange old woman Fay Holaderry. That's when Sol shifts into high gear to save Connie, and together they discover the sinister secrets of Grand Creek.



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